DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 152 893 UD 018 069

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TITLE Long Range Outcomes Associated With School Truancy.
SPONS AGENCY Public Health Service (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 78
GRANT AA-03539; DA-00013; MH-14677; MH-18864
NOTE 35p.; For a related document see UD 018 068

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anti Social Behavior; Attendance Patterns; *Behavior Patterns; *Blacks; Dropout Identification; Elementary Secondary Education; High School Students; *Longitudinal Studies; *Males; School Holding Power; *Truancy
IDENTIFIERS *Missouri (Saint Louis)

ABSTRACT

This paper presents new information about the relationship between truancy in both elementary and high school. It is based on a sample of St. Louis black schoolboys. In this longitudinal study, school records were obtained and scored with respect to attendance. The effect of truancy was examined on four adult outcomes: earnings of less than $101/week, deviant behaviors other than drug abuse, drug abuse, and psychological status. Truancy resulted in important implications for both childhood and adult outcomes of this sample. Elementary school truancy, often beginning in first grade, forecast continued truancy in high school, particularly in those who had other kinds of deviant behavior. Both elementary and high school truancy were associated with dropping out of school before completing secondary education, and also with low earnings as an adult. High school truancy was strongly related to a variety of adult deviant behaviors, including psychological disturbance. It was found that boys who graduated from high school despite truancy had considerably better adult outcomes than those whose truancy led to dropping out. (Author/AM)

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LONG RANGE OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL TRUANCY*

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*This work was supported in part by U.S.P.H.S. grants MH 18864, MH 14677, DA 00013, DA 00259, and AA 03539.

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To be published in I. Berg and L. Hersov (Eds.), Truancy: Problems of School Attendance and Refusal, John Wiley & Sons, 1978 (in press).

UD018069

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While truancy has obvious importance to the child's life while in school, by interfering with his learning, another concern is its long-term implications. There is surprisingly little literature on the relationship between truancy and later outcomes. The work of Lummis (1946) showing that truancy (non-attendance on own initiative) predicted bad army conduct and prolonged civilian unemployment among 1000 consecutive men coming through a British Army Selection Centre is in fact exceptional in addressing such a concern. Certainly many efforts to predict outcomes on the basis of childhood behaviors have included truancy as one of the predictors, but truancy has constituted only one element in a rating scale. Since analyses are not presented separately for the elements of such scales, we do not know how much truancy contributed to the success of prediction. As an example, the very interesting paper by Gersten et al. (1976) concerning the stability of childhood behavior over time includes "playing hooky" as an element in a scale of delinquent behavior. The scores on this scale are more stable from one age to another than are scores on any other of the childhood scales, but it is not possible to tell whether playing hooky itself is stable, or whether the total scale score is stable only because playing hooky at one period is associated with other delinquent behaviors at another.

Since attendance is regularly recorded by schools, the number of days on which there is absence is a readily identifiable although imperfect index of the degree of truancy. If the attendance record does indeed predict outcomes reliably, it would serve as a simple screening measure for selecting children at high risk of later problems. The question that we will address in this chapter is how effective days

absent might be as such a screening tool.

In our previous follow-up of child guidance clinic patients (Robins, 1966), we looked at the relationship between symptoms recorded in child guidance clinic records and diagnoses made after 436 expatients were approximately aged 43. Diagnosis was based on systematic interview and review of records from police, hospital, welfare, and other agencies. Truancy was one of the childhood symptoms that most reliably predicted an elevated rate of antisocial personality (referred to at that time as sociopathic personality) and alcoholism. It was a significant predictor of antisocial personality and alcoholism for men, but showed no significant relationship to disorders common in women. Because truancy was associated with a wide variety of other antisocial symptoms in the clinic records, we questioned its independence in predicting later psychiatric diagnoses. We found that it did make an independent contribution. Even among highly antisocial children (defined as having six or more different kinds of antisocial behavior), when one of those behaviors was truancy, the risk of adult antisocial personality was significantly increased. However, truancy in the absence of a large variety of childhood antisocial behaviors (when there were fewer than six such behaviors), did not significantly predict an adult diagnosis of antisocial behavior. Although truancy was a statistically significant predictor of adult psychiatric diagnoses for these ex-child guidance clinic patients, it was not a very efficient predictor. Indeed, most truant children did not warrant a diagnosis of either antisocial personality or alcoholism as adults—only 45% did (although in the absence of truancy, only 18% were so diagnosed).

Because the follow-up study of child guidance clinic patients relied for its identification of truants on a notation in the child's psychiatric clinic record, there was no quantitative information with which to establish a threshold for the degree of truancy that should alert the family or school to concern . Further, since referral to the child guidance clinic was usually for serious antisocial behavior, rarely truancy even when truancy was present, we could not be certain to what extent truancy in the general population would be equally ominous.

The Current Study

To learn more about the consequences of truancy (as well as other childhood events) in the adult lives of the general population, we selected a sample of black schoolboys from St. Louis public school records and followed them into their thirties, again with systematic interviews and an exhaustive search of records. The men in the sample were all born between 1930 and 1934, and all had IQs above the median. The upper socioeconomic group, as defined by father's occupation, was oversampled, and eight equal-sized groups representing combinations of social status, broken homes, and school problems were selected. In presenting our results, cases are weighted so that they represent the population from which these groups came: black males born in St. Louis between 1930 and 1934 who attended public schools for at least six years and had IQs of 85 or higher. (See Robins and Murphy, 1967 for a more complete description.)

Ninety-five percent (223 out of 235) were interviewed between the ages of 30 and 36, and records abstracted from hospitals, police, penal institutions, public housing, public welfare, armed forces, veterans claims records, unemployment insurance claims, etc.

To evaluate truancy, school records both in elementary school and in high school were obtained and carefully scored with respect to attendance. From studying the association between these records of attendance and outcomes, as revealed in interview and our search of records, it is possible to learn in considerable detail how school absence predicts outcome. Thus we were able to develop criteria for the amount and timing of school absence that may make possible selecting for intervention those children highly likely to have difficulties in later life. The fact that our measure of truancy comes directly from the attendance records means that it is independent of the judgments of teachers. Since the evaluation of adult outcomes was done by our staff independently of the evaluation of the school record, there has been no retrospective falsification or "halo" effects due to knowing which non-attenders turned out well or badly.

Previous Findings of the Consequences of Truancy for the Present Sample

The present paper will present new information about the relationship between truancy in elementary and high school and adult outcomes of those surviving into their thirties. In previous papers our concern has been restricted to the impact of elementary school truancy in this sample. We have shown that elementary school truants accounted for the excess mortality in black schoolboys, as compared with expected figures based on a national white male cohort (Robins, 1968). The excess mortality was accounted for principally by homicide, but truants also had an excess of deaths by natural causes. Among those who survived past the age of 25 and so were included in the follow-up, we have shown that elementary school truancy significantly predicted four

subsequent childhood events: being held back in elementary school, dropping out of high school, leaving the parental home before age 18, and marriage before age 18 (Robins and Wish, 1977). Truancy predicted these subsequent childhood behaviors at a statistically significant level even after we took into account the number and kinds of other deviant behaviors that preceded the truancy and so might have explained the subsequent behavior. We have also found that men who were truant in elementary school tended to marry women truant in elementary school and that truancy in either parent was associated with an excess rate of truancy in both sons and daughters, although transmission of truancy to the sons was more striking (Robins, Ratcliff, and West, in press). When we compared school records of the wives and children with those of our index fathers, we found that truancy in elementary school did not predict high school dropout at a statistically significant level for females in either generation, but that truancy in the sons of our subjects did predict high school dropout in just the way that it had for their fathers. This suggested that our finding in the white child guidance clinic study that truancy is a more potent predictor of outcome for males than females probably holds in black non-patient samples as well.

Methods of Assessing Truancy Levels

St. Louis school records provided number of days in attendance but seldom documented reasons for absence. Occasionally there was a notation of truancy, particularly if the student was being suspended on this account, and occasionally there was a notation of illness or the family's being out of town. When one of the latter explanations for the absence was available, we did not count the absence as a possible indicator of truancy. When there was no indication, we assumed that

absence was equivalent to truancy.

Elementary School. At the time our sample was attending elementary school, the eight school years were each divided into quarters of 50 days each. We counted a quarter as truant if there were unexplained absences for more than 10 days. Thus we are considering only massed absences—missing more than 20% of school days within a ten-week period. One out of six of our sample (17%) had no truant quarters by these criteria. An additional 35% had only one or two truant quarters, and 3%, while qualifying as absent in more than two quarters, ended their truancy early, having no truant quarter after second grade. We will consider this 38% with few quarters or early termination of truancy to have had only mild truancy. The remaining 45% will be considered often truant. That is, they were absent more than 20% of days in at least three quarters, and at least one of these quarters occurred after Grade Two. Relying on attendance records incorporates absences due to non-truancy causes, but by using a criterion of 20% of the days in three quarters for our often truant group we are including only those youths with rates of absence so high that they are unlikely to be explained by illness or parents' keeping the child at home. Figures for elementary school attendance from several sources show an average attendance rate of 90% in elementary school (Tennent, 1971; Cutter et al., 1971, New York State Education Department, 1967).

Absence in first and second graders is generally thought not to be truancy, but rather unrecorded illness or parentally instigated absence. Illnesses are supposed to decline after children have more exposure to their classmates, and parentally supported absence is supposed to decline in upper grades because parents take school attendance more

seriously for older children. We were surprised, therefore, to learn that two-thirds of the children who qualified as often truant in elementary school had at least one truant quarter in first grade. Thus, even if absence in first and second grade does occur more often because of illness or with parental consent than because of truancy, it seems to establish an attendance pattern that later is a truant one.

High School. Eight percent of our sample did not attend high school, and for 2%, we were not able to obtain high school transcripts. Five percent who did attend high school were expelled or sent to a reformatory while still enrolled. Although boys expelled or incarcerated had often been truant before this occurred, we chose to code this more serious problem in preference to truancy and so cannot include them in our study of high school truancy. For the remaining 85% for whom we had scored records of high school attendance, we judged truancy in high school based either on days attended or notations of truancy. Absences in high school were recorded on a semester basis. For those who attended high school the expected eight semesters or more, we judged as truant those who had absences of more than ten days per semester in at least two semesters. Those who dropped out without attending eight semesters had, of course, fewer semesters in which to show a pattern of excessive absence. For them, we accepted a single semester showing more than ten days of absence if it was a semester other than the one in which the dropout occurred. (We made the latter exception because dropping out is often a gradual tapering off of attendance in the final semester.) Among those high school attenders for whom we had information about attendance, the rate of truancy was 31%.

Association Between Elementary and High School Truancy. We found that chances of truanting in high school (as well as chances of being expelled or sent to a reformatory) were strongly predicted by truancy in elementary school (Table 1). Only 13% of those with no truancy in

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

elementary school became truant in high school. For those mildly truant in elementary school, the rate of high school truancy (23%) was almost twice the rate for good elementary school attenders. Those often truant in elementary school became truant in 39% of cases in high school, three times the rate for elementary non-truants.

Since elementary school truancy predicted expulsion from high school and being sent to a reformatory (10% of those often truant had either outcome, vs. 1% of the remainder), the effect of truancy in elementary school on truancy in high school is even more striking when we restrict the sample to those whose truancy was evaluated. For those often truant in elementary school, 49% were also truant in high school, 3.5 times the rate of those not truant in elementary school.

Juvenile Correlates of a Continuation of Truancy

Although truancy in elementary school did powerfully predict truancy in high school, a number of children often truant in elementary school became good attenders in high school. In an effort to discover the difference between those who "recovered" from truancy and those who did not, we examined their scores on a scale representing other juvenile deviant behaviors. These behaviors included being held back in elementary school, drinking before age 15, sex before age 15, use before age 18 of each of four illicit drugs (marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, opiates), problems with alcohol before 18, leaving the

parental home before 18, arrests before 18, and marriage before 18. Information about arrests and being held back came from juvenile court, police, and school records; information about the remaining items came from interview. Overall, subjects averaged 2.3 of these eleven childhood problems.

Students who were not truant or only mildly truant in elementary school had fewer of these other deviant behaviors than did those frequently truant in elementary school. Those not truant at all or only mildly truant in elementary school had four or more of these indicators of deviance in 14% of cases, as compared with 35% of those often truant in elementary school. We found (Table 2) that juvenile

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

deviance was associated with the continuation of truancy from grade school into high school. Children who were often truant in grade school usually truanted in high school <u>unless</u> they had very little deviant behavior of other kinds. Juvenile deviance was also associated with <u>beginning</u> truancy in high school among those who had not truanted or were only mildly truant in grade school. Those who did little truanting in grade school rarely began truanting in high school unless they were extremely deviant in other ways, in which case almost half became truant. We can also see from Table 2 that elementary school truancy had an impact on high school truancy even when we controlled for other childhood deviance. Those often truant in grade school were more likely to truant in high school at each level of our juvenile deviance scale, although the difference is trivial among the non-deviant.

We find, then, that elementary school truancy had a clear impact on high school attendance, but that this impact was mediated by the variety of other forms of youthful deviance. Since truancy in elementary school and its appearance in high school was associated with juvenile deviance of various kinds, we will need to be careful when we look at the impact of truancy on later outcomes that we are not simply using truancy as an indicator of the general level of juvenile deviance.

The Effect of Truancy on Final Educational Level

Since our sample represents the upper half of the IQ range, failure to finish high school was never attributable to a lack of adequate intelligence. In this intellectually able sample, truancy and deviance probably played an even larger role in high school completion than it does in the total population of children.

Among those who met our criteria for truancy neither in elementary nor in high school, only 3% failed to graduate from high school (Table 3). Of those often truant in elementary school whose truancy

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

continued into high school, 75% failed to graduate. (Remember that these are all voluntary dropouts. Those expelled are not counted because we did not know whether or not they had been truant before expulsion.) While the relationship between high school truancy and dropout seems inevitable, it is of interest that dropping out of high school was also influenced by the level of elementary school truancy both among those who did and those who did not truant in high school.

Of necessity, the high rate of failure to complete high school among students truant in both elementary and high school implied that they would have a very low level of college attendance and graduation.

Only 9% attended college at all, and only 2% became college graduates. Parts B and C of Table 3 show that truants' relative failure to enter and graduate from college was entirely explained by their relative failure to graduate from an academic high school. There was no regular relationship between truancy in elementary or high school and entering college among those who completed an academic high school, nor between truancy and graduating from college among those who entered college.

Having shown that truancy was associated with juvenile deviance, we may wonder whether the strong effect of truancy on high school graduation and therefore on final educational level was independent of its association with deviance. In Table 4 we note that none of the chil-

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

dren without significant truancy was a highly deviant juvenile, and that virtually all non-truants graduated from high school. At each level of deviance, the chances of graduating from high school decreased with an increase in the amount of truancy. The difference is particularly striking for those with mild amounts of deviance, where more than 90% graduated without any significant truancy but less than 40% graduated if they had been truant in high school. Few highly deviant children graduated, but even they showed considerable effect of truancy. Whereas a third of those who were not truant in high school did graduate despite their deviant behavior, only 6% did so if they were truant in high school, and none graduated if they had been both truant in high school and often truant in elementary school. Thus truancy greatly influenced high school graduation at all levels of deviance.

Since high school graduation in turn has ----------

substantial effects on job opportunities, not only in terms of prestige and salary but also in terms of job security, any effect of truancy on occupational success can be expected to be mediated to some extent through its effect on high school graduation. Opportunities for occupational success in turn will probably have important consequences for all kinds of adult problems, such as drinking, arrests, and depression. We will be interested in learning whether truancy has any additional effect on occupational success or its correlates when its effect on high school graduation is held constant. If it is found to have no further effect, this would suggest that the stigmatization of the truant as a dropout might have been more important in determining his later outcome than any effect that non-attendance at school might have had on his fund of knowledge or his competence.

The Effect of Truancy on Adult Outcomes

We will examine the effect of truancy on four measures of adult outcomes: earnings of less than $101/week, deviant behaviors other than drug abuse, drug abuse, and psychological status. Since higher paying jobs go to high school graduates, and since we have shown that truants often drop out before graduation, we would expect to see an effect of truancy on earnings. Since we know from previous work that juvenile deviant behavior predicts adult deviant behavior, and since we have shown truancy to be associated with juvenile deviant behavior, we would also expect to find a correlation between truancy and adult deviance. There has been little in the literature to suggest that truancy ought to be associated with psychological symptoms. In fact, there has been a long-standing view that deviant behaviors (of which we can consider truancy one) and psychological symptoms are alternative

ways of responding to life's problems. However, since we found no such inverse correlation between levels of deviant behavior and psychological symptoms in our earlier work (Robins, 1966), we might expect either no relationship between truancy and psychological state in this sample or perhaps even a positive one.

Earnings. As expected, earnings were highly correlated with truancy (Table 5A). Almost all (85%) of those who did not truant

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

were earning more than $100 per week at time of interview or when last employed; only about a third of those who truanted in high school were earning this much. Those who truanted only in elementary school earned less than those not truant at all. This pattern of relationships between truancy and earnings closely resembles the pattern of relationships between high school graduation and truancy, as we expected.

Adult Deviant Behavior and Drug Use. Combining information from records and interview, we scored nine kinds of adult deviant behavior: alcohol abuse; marital problems; criminality; parental irresponsibility (fathering an illegitimate child, or failing to support legitimate ones); violence as indicated by getting into fights or wife and child beating; job problems as indicated by long periods of unemployment, excessive absenteeism or tardiness while working, being fired for incompetence, and never holding high status jobs; disciplinary problems in the military; "street life," by which we refer to spending much leisure time away from home and in bars, poolrooms, or out on the streets; and drug abuse. To discover whether these behaviors all formed a single dimension of deviance, we performed a principal

components factor analytic evaluation of them (Armor, 1974). We found that all except drug abuse did form a single dimension. Although drug abuse had some association with other forms of deviance, it also was associated with the psychological problems we will be discussing later, and it did not fall more clearly within the deviance dimension than within the psychological one. Among the deviance measures which did form a single dimension, the one with the smallest factor loading (i.e., least well associated with other deviance variables) was street life. Street life was also about as strongly associated with drug abuse as with the other deviance measures. We summed the eight variables which formed a single dimension by factor analysis to form an "Adult Deviance" scale and kept drug abuse separate from both the deviance and psychological status scales.

Section B of Table 5 shows that truancy was indeed a good predictor of scores on the Adult Deviance scale. Those who had no significant truancy had the lowest mean score (5.5) while those who were often truant in grade school and also truant in high school had a mean score almost twice that high (10.1). Section C of Table 5 looks at the effect of truancy on individual deviant behaviors making up the Adult Deviance scale and on drug abuse. It will be noted that for alcohol problems, marital problems, criminality, and job problems, high school truancy had a marked effect but elementary school truancy did not (that is, in Table 5C there is little difference among Columns 1 to 3 or between Columns 4 and 5, but a large difference between Columns 3 and 4). Violence was also better predicted by high school than elementary school truancy, but an absence of truancy in both elementary and high school meant a virtual freedom from violence.

Parental irresponsibility is the only behavior more closely associated with elementary than high school truancy. Problems in the military were predicted by a combination of frequent truancy in both elementary and high school. Since drug abuse and participation in street life were strongly associated, it is no surprise that they have a similar pattern of relationships with truancy. Both drug abuse and street life are largely restricted to men who became truant in high school for the first time. Our finding of a different pattern for drug abuse than for other deviant behaviors echoes the findings of others (e.g., Johnston, 1973) that adolescent drug abuse, unlike delinquency and other forms of deviance, is not associated with early school problems or with low IQ. Rather it is associated with the onset about age 15 of precocious drinking and sexual activity. Concomitantly, truancy begins.

Psychological Outcomes. To study the relationship between truancy and adult psychological status, we created an Adult Psychological Status scale composed of four subscales representing a) the number of anxiety symptoms reported in interview, b) the number of depressive symptoms reported in interview, c) self-report of hallucinations (seeing or hearing something that others could not see or hear, other than the voice of a dead relative) or a report in psychiatric records of hallucinations or delusions, and d) treatment for psychiatric problems. Table 5D shows a positive relationship between truancy and this adult psychological status scale. Those truant in high school had average scores almost twice as high as those who were never truant, just as we found in comparing their scores on the Adult Deviance scale. Truancy in elementary school had less effect on psychological

problems than did high school truancy, again the same pattern of relationships we observed between truancy and adult deviance.

When we examine the effects of truancy on the elements of the psychological status scale (Table 5E), we find that high school truancy was associated with an increased level of each problem. The psychiatric care variable is somewhat contaminated with deviance, since psychiatric care includes hospitalization for the treatment of alcoholism and drug abuse. However, the fact that anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, and hallucinations and delusions each increased with high school truancy shows that the correlation between truancy and overall poor psychological adjustment is not an artifact of hospitalization for deviant behaviors.

Does Truancy Affect Outcomes Other Than Through Encouraging Dropout?

Truancy is clearly associated with each of the adult outcomes we examined. We had anticipated its relationship with earnings, based on our observation that truancy predicted high school dropout, and we considered the possibility that low earnings and other aspects of poor occupational opportunities might result in low self esteem with concurrent depressive and anxiety symptoms. Low earnings might also encourage theft to increase income and substance abuse to overcome feelings of alienation and low self esteem. It was thus possible that all these later effects of truancy might have been mediated through truancy's effect on high school graduation. To learn whether truancy had any additional long-term effects, we considered its relationship to adult outcomes separately for high school graduates and nongraduates.

While high school graduation was generally associated with an increased likelihood of earning more than $100 a week, remarkably,

for children often truant in grade school who continued to be truant in high school, graduation from high school made no contribution to their earnings, so severely were earnings affected by truancy (Table 6). Truancy decreased the chances of higher earnings for graduates

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

and nongraduates, with high school truancy playing the more important role. High school truancy also had a striking effect on adult deviance scores for both graduates and nongraduates, and on psychological status scores for nongraduates, although there was no such effect for graduates. Truancy initiated in high school predicted drug use only for those who failed to complete high school. Half (56%) of the nongraduates who had initiated truancy in high school used drugs regularly, in contrast to one-fourth or less of all other groups. We find, then, that truancy usually continues to show an effect even after taking into account the fact that it frequently impedes high school graduation. That is not to say that truancy's leading to dropping out of high school was not a main factor in its impact on adult outcomes. Those who graduated generally earned more and had less adult deviance and fewer psychological problems, but truancy still had an additional effect beyond its effect on graduation.

Having found that truancy continues to have an effect, even taking high school graduation into account, the final question remains: is that effect of truancy entirely due to its association with other forms of juvenile deviance?

The Effect of Truancy on Adult Outcome, Controlling on Juvenile Deviance and High School Graduation

Needing to hold constant both deviance and high school graduation when we look at the relationship between truancy and adult outcomes

strains our sample size severely. To preserve cells of a reasonable size, we divided high school dropouts and graduates at approximately their respective medians with respect to juvenile deviance. Because high school truancy was a stronger predictor of adult outcomes than elementary school truancy, we simplified our measure of truancy into those who were and who were not truant in high school. Table 7

INSERT TABLE 7 HERE

presents results for the eight resulting subsamples with respect to their earnings, their scores on the Adult Deviance and Psychological Status scales, and their regular use of illicit drugs.

There are 16 comparisons available between high school truants and nontruants. In all but three of these 16 comparisons, truants fared worse than nontruants. Two of the three exceptions were in drug use, which we have previously noted was not regularly related to high school truancy. The third exception was in the psychological status of high school graduates free of deviance. Both truants and non-truants in this favored group had few psychological symptoms. Indeed, aside from its effect on their earnings, truancy had little effect on the outcomes of nondeviant high school graduates. In this group, both truants and non-truants were rarely deviant adults, rarely used drugs, and were almost free of psychological problems.

Among highly deviant children, the additional effects of truancy were remarkably large in both graduates and non-graduates. For both, truancy had substantial effects on earnings and adult deviance.

To compare the relative contributions of high school truancy, graduation, and juvenile deviance to these four outcomes, we entered them into a Multiple Classification Analysis (Table 8). We found

INSERT TABLE 8 HERE

that together they explained a substantial amount of the variance in adult deviance (30%), 17% of the variance in adult drug abuse, 13% of the variance in low earnings, and only 9% of the variance in psychological status.

The three predictor variables were approximately equally powerful with respect to predicting adult deviance and psychological status. For deviance, truancy had only a slightly lower beta value (i.e., its contribution after adjusting for the contribution of the other two predictors) than did juvenile deviance (.20 vs. .26) and graduation (.20 vs. .22). With respect to psychological status, truancy had the same beta as juvenile deviance and slightly less than that of graduation. With respect to drug abuse, only deviance made an independent contribution; neither high school graduation nor truancy added to its effect. With respect to predicting low earnings, high school truancy was the only important one of the three variables, alone accounting for 10% of the variance after adjustment for the impact of the other two variables, out of the 13% explained by all three.

Thus, we can conclude that high school truancy is a particularly good childhood predictor of very low earnings, and a reasonably good predictor of adult deviance—about as good as high school graduation or other forms of deviance. None of our childhood predictors was very effective in predicting psychological status, but truancy was as effective as the others. High school truancy was not an independent predictor of adult drug abuse, as we suspected earlier when we found that it was predictive only when there had been no elementary school truancy and only if there was also significant deviant behavior of other kinds.

Conclusions and Implications

We have shown that truancy had important implications for both childhood and adult outcomes of our sample of young black men. Elementary school truancy, often beginning in first grade, forecast continued truancy in high school, particularly in those who had other kinds of deviant behavior such as early drinking, early sexual activity, illicit drug use, and delinquency. Boys not truant in elementary school seldom became truant later unless they began this set of adolescent deviant behaviors at the same time. Both elementary and high school truancy were associated with dropping out of school before completing secondary education, and also with low earnings as an adult. High school truancy was strongly related to a variety of adult deviant behaviors, and somewhat associated with psychological disturbance.

These dismal outcomes for truant schoolboys were in part explained by the truants' failure to finish high school and by their concurrent adolescent deviance, but truancy itself continued to have predictive power even when these intermediary events were taken into account. In a previous paper (Robins, Ratcliff, West, in press) we showed that in addition to the effects discussed here, those truant in elementary school tended to marry women who had been similarly truant and to produce truant sons and daughters, thus perpetuating a truant pattern in the next generation.

We do not know how generalizable these findings are to other populations, but they are sufficiently similar to our findings among our male white child guidance clinic patients of an earlier generation that we suspect them of having considerable generalizability for males.

Our findings of long-term effects of truancy could probably be duplicated with many other forms of childhood deviance. Delinquency, early drinking, fighting, etc. may each prognosticate adult problems, assortative mating with similar spouses, and the parenting of similarly affected offspring. Truancy is a special case, however, for two reasons: It is readily detectable from routinely kept school attendance records, and it typically shows itself earlier than does any other form of childhood deviant behavior. Thus detecting children in whom to invest effort is simple, and if preventive efforts were successful, they could be expected to affect not only truancy levels, but to forestall a variety of related deviant acts that may otherwise appear later. In this sample, excessive absences were almost always detectable in the very first year of school, allowing intervention before the academic failure that frequently follows truancy occurs and makes school attendance even less attractive, thus intensifying and prolonging the truancy.

While truancy is interesting just because it presents opportunities for early intervention, there is nothing in our study to suggest that later intervention would be useless. Boys who entered secondary school with a history of prior truancy were not only at high risk of continuing their truancy there, but also of dropping out even if their truancy subsided. A review of elementary school attendance records for high school entrants would allow identifying this high risk group. Finally, we found that boys who graduated from high school despite truancy there had considerably better adult outcomes than those whose truancy led to dropping out. This suggests that it may be worth experimenting with methods for encouraging completion of high school

even for this very high risk population. Of course, our findings were not based on an experiment. We do not know, therefore, whether those few who graduated despite a history of truancy had special personal assets we have not evaluated, or whether they happened to encounter a favorable home or school environment that accounted for their success. To the extent that the explanation was the latter, forms of successful intervention to allow deviant, truant children to finish high school may be discoverable.

Among high school students, there is a group who begin truanting after no school problems in elementary school. We have found such adolescents to have frequently begun engaging in early sexual experimentation, drinking and drug abuse about the time they began truanting. This combination of behaviors forecasts dropping out of school, and after dropping out, a strong likelihood of continuing deviance and drug abuse. Such children who had no indicators of intellectual or social problems before exposure to the drug and alcohol scene in adolescence can be identified through the dramatic change in their attendance records. Given their early promise and their disastrous outcomes if their truancy culminates in dropping out, they are a group for whom intervention is particularly appropriate.

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Table 1.

TRUANCY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

	Truancy in Elementary School		
	None	Mild: One or two quarters or none after Grade Two	Often: Three or more quarters, at least one after Grade Two
	(37)	(82)	(98)
High School Experience			
Did not enter High School	11%	4%	11%
Expelled or sent to reformatory	1	1	10
Truant	13	23	39
None of these	75%	72%	40%
Truancy among those attending and not expelled or sent to reformatory	(32) 14%	(78) 24%	(78) 49%

Table 2.

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN JUVENILE DEVIANCE AND

CONTINUING TRUANCY INTO HIGH SCHOOL

Percent Truant in High School, Given for Levels of
Elementary School Truancy and Juvenile Deviance

	Truancy in Elementary School			
	Not truant or mildly truant		Often truant	
Juvenile Deviance Score*	N	%	N	%
0 - 1	(57)	16	(26)	20
2 - 3	(37)	19	(23)	60
4+	(16)	44	(27)	69

*The juvenile deviance score is a sum of eleven items: being held back in elementary school, drinking before age 15, sex before age 15, use before age 18 of each of four illicit drugs (marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, opiates), problems with alcohol before 18, leaving the parental home before 18, arrests before 18, and marriage before 18.

Table 3.

EFFECT OF TRUANCY ON FINAL EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

		Truancy in Elementary and High School			
	Not truant in either	Mild in Elementary, not truant in High	Often in Elementary, not truant in High	None or Mild in Elementary, truant in High	Often in Elementary, truant in High
A. Final Educational Level	(28)	(59)	(40)	(23)	(38)
High school dropout	3%	22%	29%	54%	75%
Completed technical high	8	4	12	8	8
Completed academic high, no college	48	29	18	21	8
Any college	41	45	41	17	9
College graduate	13	12	8	2	2
B. College among those completing academic high schools	(25) 46%	(44) 61%	(23) 70%	(9) 45%	(7) 51%
C. College graduation among those entering college	(12) 31%	(27) 26%	(16) 19%	(4) 12%	(3) 29%

TABLE 4

THE EFFECT OF TRUANCY ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION,

FOR DEVIANT AND NON-DEVIANT CHILDREN

Percent Graduating from High School, Given for
Levels of Truancy and Juvenile Deviance

Juvenile Deviance Score	Truancy in Elementary and High School: Not Truant in Either		Mild in Elementary, Not Truant in High		Often in Elementary, Not Truant in High		None or Mild in Elementary, Truant in High		Often in Elementary, Truant in High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 - 1	(20)	100	(28)	89	(21)	81	(9)	75	(5)	77
2 - 3	(8)	90	(22)	84	(9)	74	(7)	32	(14)	40
4+	(0)	-	(9)	33	(8)	39	(7)	23	(19)	0

Table 5.

TRUANCY AS A PREDICTOR OF ADULT OUTCOMES

	Truancy in Elementary and High School				
	Not Truant in Either	Mild in Elementary, not truant in High	Often in Elementary, not truant in High	None or Mild in Elementary, truant in High	Often in Elementary, truant in High
	(28)	(59)	(40)	(23)	(38)
Adult Outcomes					
A. Earn > $100/wk. (Percent)	85%	73%	59%	32%	38%
B. Deviance Score (mean)	5.5	6.3	5.8	9.2	10.1
C. Elements of Deviance Scale and Drug Use (Percent)					
Alcohol problems	14%	12%	12%	40%	45%
Marital problems (if married 2+ yrs.)	25	39	27	55	57
Criminality	29	29	25	49	61
Job problems	15	21	23	49	55
Violence	4	18	16	36	34
Parental irresponsibility	21	41	50	57	59
Military problems (if served)	38	28	30	34	60
Street life	21	29	21	42	28
Regular illicit drug use	2	19	20	43	14
D. Psychological Status (mean)	2.2	3.1	2.6	4.1	4.0
E. Elements of Psychological Status Scale (Percent)					
Anxiety (2+ symptoms)	19%	33%	27%	48%	35%
Depression (2+ symptoms)	23	42	39	47	53
Hallucinations, delusions	11	13	11	17	21
Treatment	32	44	38	53	65

Table 6.

TRUANCY AND ADULT OUTCOMES FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES AND DROPOUTS

Adult Outcomes	Truancy in Elementary and High School: No truancy or mild in Elementary only	Often in Elementary, Not truant in High	None or mild in Elementary, truant in High	Often truant in Elementary, truant in High
High School Graduates	(74)	(28)	(11)	(10)
Earned > $100/week	79%	74%	45%	36%
Mean deviance score	5.2	5.2	7.6	6.0
Mean psychological status score	2.7	2.4	2.9	2.6
Regular illicit drug use	12%	25%	27%	0%
High School Dropouts	(14)	(12)	(13)	(28)
Earned > $100/week	67%	52%	23%	40%
Mean deviance score	8.9	7.2	10.6	11.5
Mean psychological status score	3.5	3.1	5.1	4.5
Regular illicit drug use	24%	10%	56%	19%

Table 7.

EFFECT OF HIGH SCHOOL TRUANCY ON ADULT OUTCOMES BEYOND THAT ACCOUNTED FOR BY ITS ASSOCIATION WITH DEVIANCE AND DROPOUT

	Dropouts				Graduates			
	High Juvenile Deviance (4+)		Low or Mild Deviance (0-3)		High or Moderate Juvenile Deviance (2+)		Low Deviance (0-1)	
	High school truant	Not High school truant	High school truant	Not High school truant	High school truant	Not High school truant	High school truant	Not High school truant
Adult Outcomes	(24)	(11)	(17)	(14)	(10)	(39)	(11)	(62)
Earns > $100/wk.	27%	89%	44%	54%	30%	63%	47%	79%
Uses drugs regularly	43%	18%	12%	14%	18%	32%	11%	4%
Mean deviance score	12.4	8.8	9.4	7.5	8.4	5.9	5.5	5.0
Mean psychological status score	4.9	3.9	4.4	2.7	3.4	2.8	2.2	2.5

Table 8.

MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF HIGH SCHOOL TRUANCY, HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION, AND JUVENILE DEVIANCE ON FOUR ADULT OUTCOMES

	Adult Outcomes			
	Earnings >$100	Deviance Scale	Psychological Status	Drug Abuse
Total explained variance	.13	.30	.09	.17
Betas for				
High School truancy	-.31	.20	.11	.03
High School graduation	*	.22	.15	*
Juvenile deviance	-.12	.26	.11	.47

* = Reversed direction after adjustment for contributions of the other two predictors.